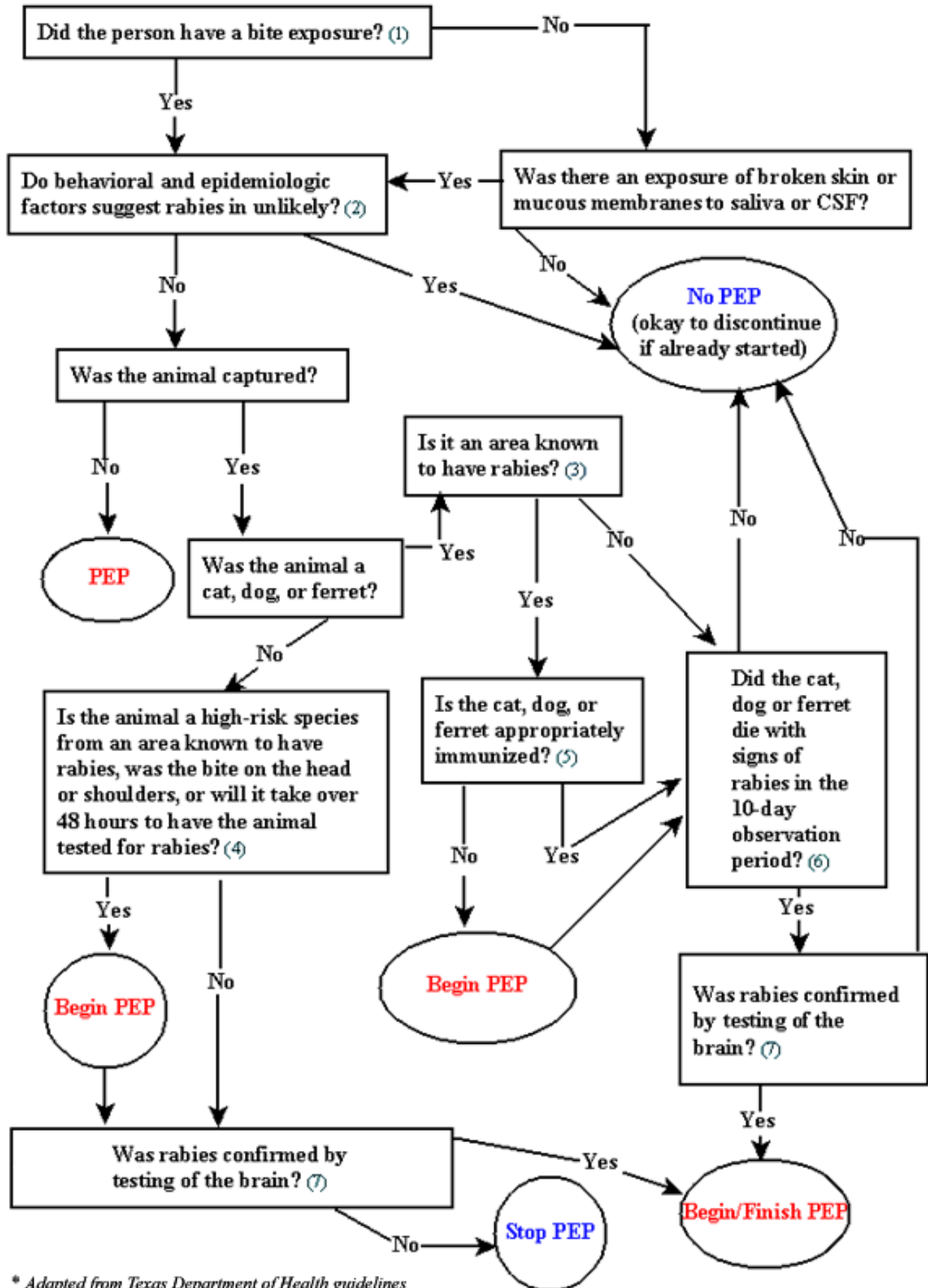


Human Rabies Postexposure Prophylaxis (PEP) Algorithm*



* Adapted from Texas Department of Health guidelines

Elaboration of the algorithm

(Reference: *Humans Rabies Prevention—United States, 1999 Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices* - See full document for further information)

(1) Rabies is transmitted only when the virus is introduced into bite wounds, open cuts in skin, or onto mucous membranes. Any penetration of the skin by teeth constitutes a bite. Some animals, such as bats, can inflict only minor injury and go undetected. These bites also constitute potential exposure to rabies.

Nonbite exposures from terrestrial animals rarely cause rabies. The nonbite exposures of highest risk appear to be among individuals exposed to large amounts of aerosolized rabies virus and surgical recipients of corneas transplanted from patients who died of rabies.

The contamination of open wounds, abrasions, mucous membranes, or theoretically, scratches, with saliva or other potentially infectious material (neural tissue) from a rabid animal also constitutes a nonbite exposure.

Petting a rabid animal and contact with blood, urine, or feces of a rabid animal does NOT constitute an exposure.

(2) An unprovoked attack by an animal is more likely than a provoked attack to indicate that the animal is rabid. Bites inflicted on a person attempting to feed or handle an apparently healthy animal should generally be regarded as provoked. A currently vaccinated dog, cat, or ferret is unlikely to become infected with rabies.

(3) The likelihood of rabies in domestic and wild animals varies by region and by state. Thus, the need for postexposure prophylaxis also varies. Mississippi has not had any confirmed terrestrial animal rabies since 1965. However, rabid bats are identified every year from different counties. For the latest rabies statistics in your area, call the MSDH Division of Epidemiology at 601-576-7725.

(4) High risk species include unvaccinated dogs, cats, ferrets, and raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. The closer the bite is to the brain, the shorter the incubation period. Bites from small rodents (such as squirrels, rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, and chipmunks,) lagomorphs (such as rabbits and hares), moles, birds, and opossums are almost never found to be infected with rabies and are considered very low risk.

(5) Appropriately vaccinated means that the animal was vaccinated in accordance with the *Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control*. See the state of Mississippi's animal vaccination regulations for state specific modifications to the *Compendium*.

(6) If a cat, dog, or ferret becomes sick within the 10-day confinement period, the animal should immediately be evaluated by a veterinarian for evidence of rabies. If rabies is suggestive, the animal should be immediately euthanized and the head submitted to the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab or the MSDH Public Health Laboratory (PHL) for rabies testing. All rabies testing on animals is done by the MSDH-PHL.

(7) If rabies is confirmed, the exposed individual should start or finish the recommended course of postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) without variation of the schedule. The confirmation of rabies must be reported to the Division of Epidemiology and the case will be investigated. If rabies is not identified then PEP should be stopped.

